8b
NA
737
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A4
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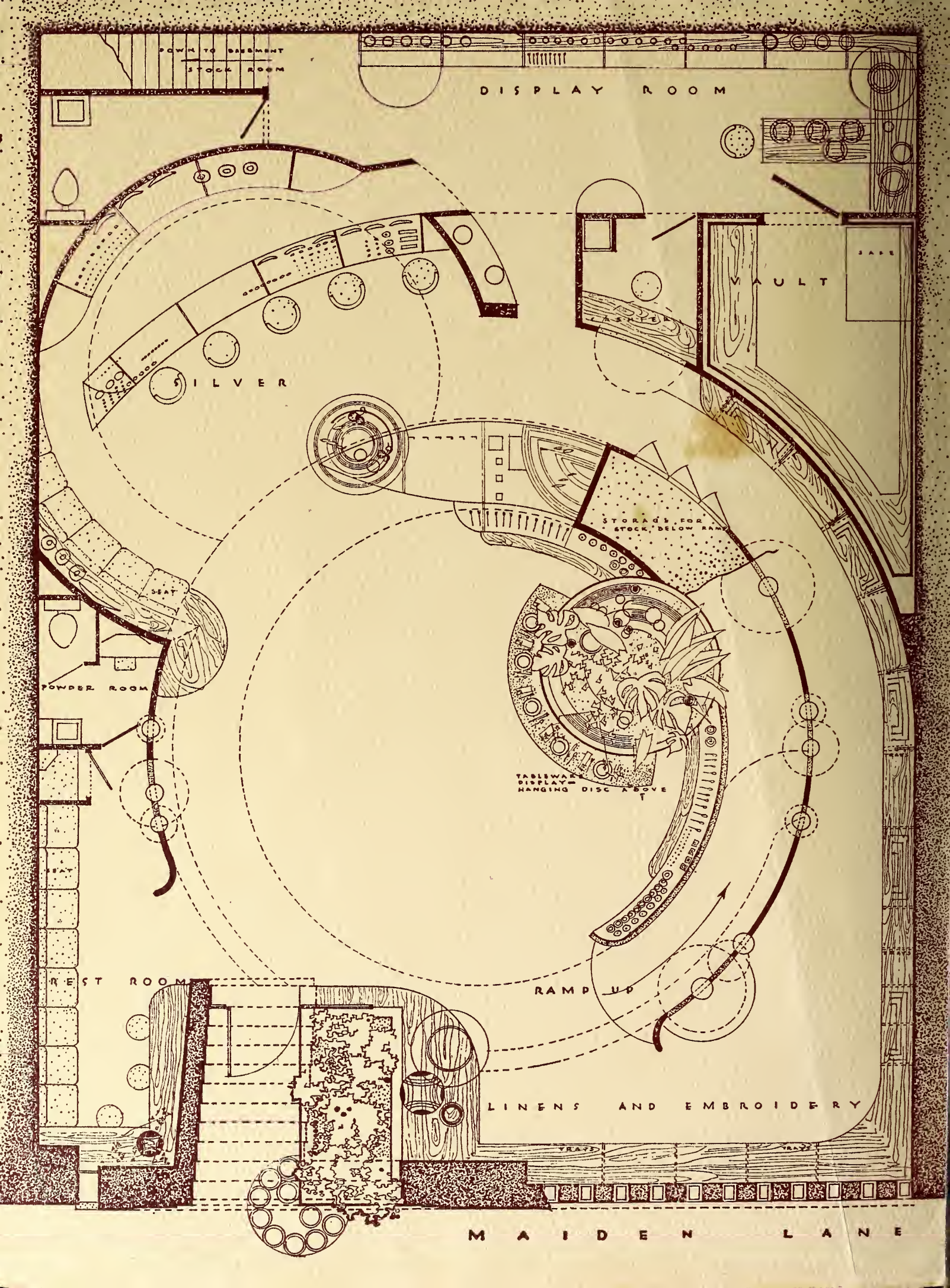
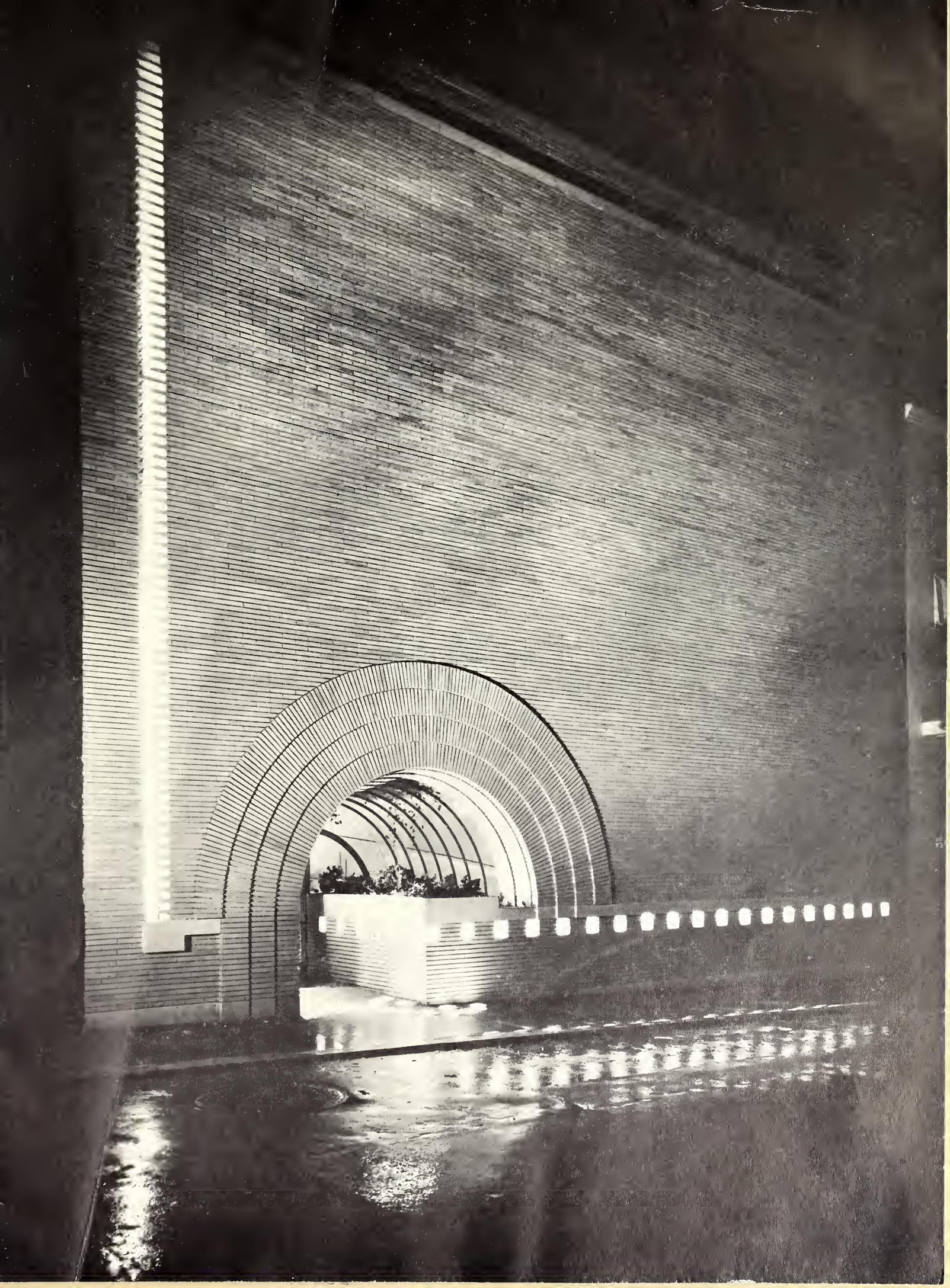
208


DOWN TO BASEMENT
STOCK ROOM
DISPLAY ROOM
SAFE
VAULT
CASHIER
SILVER
STORAGE FOR STOCK BELOW RAMP
SEAT
POWDER ROOM
TABLEWARE DISPLAY— HANGING DISC ABOVE
SEAT
REST ROOM
RAMP UP
LINENS AND EMBROIDERY
TRAYS
TRAYS
TRAYS
MAIDEN LANE



A WORD FROM THE OWNERS---MR. AND MRS. V. C. MORRIS

As visitors (from the world over) come through the deep brick entrance-arch they stand seeming spellbound for a moment to gaze at the rhythmic spiral form of the central ramp rising on and upward to the patterned fantasy of the suspended light-diffusing screen with its groups of luminous opalescent bubbles appearing to ascend in clusters through the great discs of the ceiling. It is for them a breathless moment . . .

Our needs were practical as well as esthetic. We needed an architectural setting for the display of contemporary fine glass and silver, china, linens and art objects for the contemporary home, and a place where combinations of these accessories can be leisurely assembled, seen to advantage and be well chosen. Low comfortable benches were needed where one may experiment one's self with combinations of silver, glass and china, or may consider and study some object of art in relation to one's own home or as a suitable gift. Without sacrificing spaciousness, drawers and shelves were to be conveniently incorporated . . .

We were hesitant to ask this great architect to help us because of his well known refusal to remodel, but he said, "Nonsense, it would be a pleasure." Instantly when the problem of space was presented by us he decided that we should use the ramp: a staircase would be too tight, an elevator to be economical would need more height. We had thought of the ramp as straight. But soon here it came, the easiest shape to negotiate the travel between ground floor and floor above.

Concerning it—an architect happening in from Melbourne, Australia, said: "You have accomplished the ultimate in free movement. Instead of going here and there to buy this or that, one naturally follows the circle to see things and makes his own selection without confusion or distraction. Here you can find everything." Yes, everything in our shop you see, and it sees you.

The ceiling was a victory snatched from defeat. To mask two skylights, 30 x 15 feet, the architect intended a so-called "mosaic screen" of flash glass which the building regulations rendered difficult. We had found a man in the city who had already made for us models in plastic of the little windows for the front. Mr. Wright thought their quality wonderful, said we must have the same material for the suspended light-diffusing ceiling. He called in the plastics representative, worked out the screen, which is forty feet square, cut off at the corners by the plastered circular screen wall of the room. You don't think of the screen as a shape at all, you look up and it gives the effect of a New Years Eve. Sunlight and daylight constantly change the opalescent color; sometimes it is sky blue. At night fluorescent lights make the whole ceiling glow, but the lights themselves are not evident. And the necessary evil of the sprinkler system is turned to account as part of the design . . .

A surprising experience has been that the integrity and beauty of the building, silently and insistently discarding anything unworthy, not only demands of each article shown the same inherent beauty and integrity but displays it with good effect.

Some hundreds of people a day come in the shop to see us. We are learning to navigate the place, to take care of these great numbers of people. We are doing very well. We have a more national —even international— business than we ever had before.

THE MORRIS SHOP

Transcribed from an article by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. in "Art News."

It is the work, inside and out, of Frank Lloyd Wright, master architect of America. Recently this new shop opened in San Francisco: a shop designed to make the task of buying gifts even a greater luxury than receiving them.

For many years V. C. Morris has offered the Bay-region fine table furnishings: crystals, porcelains, silvers and linens, and a few informal and occasional gifts from anywhere on earth if they were well made. An increasingly selective public has more and more demanded pure shapes and simple details and these always characterize the Morris selection. Modern elegance was bound sooner or later to require its due settings. So the Morrises called on Frank Lloyd Wright as most likely to design one, in keeping with their ideals. The shop he built for them has been the talk of architectural circles in recent months, world-wide. Ever since its unorthodox facade shut out curious onlookers from a conjectured spectacle and tempted them by a glimpse through the unique deep-set brick entry crowds had gathered there waiting to come in and see the finished shop. The little midtown street of Maiden Lane where the Morrises are situated, had then to be closed for a time.

What claimed these crowds and this conversation? Above all, the principles of preciousness and spaciousness. A great unbroken wall of brick—undecorated but in itself a great decoration conceals, as a great blind wall has traditionally concealed, treasure—but in this case seems to proclaim it. No open fronts, no street windows to pull in the idle shopper? No. Only a deep ample arch of brick over glass is entry display and temptation. All this in one touch.

Inside loom warm tones of brick, tile and a great spiral of comprehensive sweep beneath a richly luminous ceiling of a new type of plastic material. There are ample walnut cases and occasional placques set in or against the surrounding walls. A great disc filled with plants, floating beneath the ceiling screen is the next surprise. The table beneath and its tempting display of table service created to embellish food and drink are things originally of the earth like these clays and woods, russet and ocher tones but here creating an atmosphere of beauty complete. So it is not as paradoxical as it may seem that within this warm glow the silver gleams and the clear crystal sparkles with unaccustomed brightness as in an atmosphere of its own.

There is an unaccountable atmosphere of spacious uplift in this smallish rectangle, the center of which is quite free and open to a plastic sky as around it sweeps a slow-rising majestic ramp which seems to unroll space around about one as the symbolic red-carpet did under-foot. In the periphery of this circle and the corners behind it are the counters and displays of the shop. Each corner has its specialty. The inviting ramp leads to a mezzanine containing less formal wares for buffets and occasional serving (and at the back, the offices). The most remarkable corner is that devoted to silver: it has a special light-reflecting cupola of gold—a celebration of the noble metals well displayed beneath it.

The main ceiling over the ascending ramp is all light, either day or dusk. It consists of a regular play of plastic, light-diffusing bubbles great and small in a pattern that is imaginative as foliage but not distracting. Airy illumination is by it spread upon the whole, a crowning sky compounded of the grace, fantasy and orderliness of a soft transparent material. It is not often that architecture has ever done so much to set off the virtues of objects and to encourage the pleasant exercise of generosity if it ever happened before.

But the Morris shop is far more than a handsome display of objects; it evokes the character of good living in fine homes. There is nothing new in simulating the usages of real life in a store, showing table settings and even entire dining rooms so that the shopper may imagine that the things before him are already in a home. It was not to be expected that Frank Lloyd Wright would be satisfied with such commonplace shamming. Nor can one suppose that the average store display has anything in common with the stimulating impressions provided by a Frank Lloyd Wright background. Throughout the Morris shop there are groups of objects so associated that they do evoke the image of a superior home. But always this is merely suggested, and the home—presented as a shadowy image—is one whose simple elegance and eloquent space enhance every inherent grace of the objects present in the sharp focus of reality. How rare it is in any shop old or new not to sense a discord of shape against shape or the clash of pattern against pattern. As a rule it is either the overdone or the neglect of space and light combined with the most inappropriate kind of furniture with which glass and silver, china and linen are seen. Here, on the other hand, in the freest sense of space and the most persuasive of lighting effects playing successfully against expertly planned surfaces, contrasting one after another as in a symphony—is a true concert wherein various items of merchandise are consciously given the intimate character of personal possessions and the whole becomes an unforgettable personal experience.

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Transcribed from an article by Elizabeth Mock in the "Architectural Forum"

After doing everything but stores for 40 years or more Frank Lloyd Wright emerges with this iconoclastic shock in the way of a shop for the V. C. Morrises, San Francisco people who collect—wherever the best is made—modern silver, glass, china and linen for sale.

Today every freshman architect, every merchant, knows that a modern store has an open front —the more open the better—and a free-flow plan among piles of merchandise. Frank Lloyd Wright knows these things too. He might even be said to have invented them. And it is in full and happy consciousness of a heresy of his own that he has chosen to ignore them, along with the other features of the latest in contemporary store design.

Instead of the conventional open front, his shop presents to its narrow historical "lane" a great blank wall, in texture a corduroy of golden yellow roman-brick.

Instead of the conventionally open plan, there is a great spiral ramp circling the rectangular space enclosing it and modeling the interior into sharply defined levels of sales areas, all richly lighted from above by a pendant screen of a new luminous plastic.

Instead of conventionally correct "scientific" lighting, the illumination that is here is indefinable, wholly atmospheric.

Even the display technique itself is unorthodox, for most repetitious articles are stored out of sight, and visible merchandise is displayed and treated individually as part of the shop architecture.

Thus the architect has flouted every "rule" of modern merchandising, yet everyone must admit that the store works as salesmanship at least as well or better than its more stereotyped contemporaries. Are the rules then too limited? Or does it take a master architect to play the game his own way and still come out so far ahead?

Consider the facade. It is not open, nor is it truly shut, for the wall is negated as a barrier by the compelling invitation of the funneled archway and negated as awesome mass by the paradoxical brick-in-glass entrance vault that reveals the brickwork as itself a noble decoration. The passerby is arrested, tempted by the breach in the bold bare wall, while the whole mass stays quiet, urbane, elegant among its neighbors. One is tantalized by this tempting glimpse of the interior. Anticipating delight through surprise (an emotional sequence generally overlooked) he tends to accept the invitation of the flaring arch and goes inside.

Inside he finds release in a world of undreamed fantasy all gold and gray and white, dominated by a ramp that spirals up like Jacob's ladder—or a wave checked in its break—toward light that filters through a translucent screen of plastic discs and half-bubbles, clustered in brass tubing and poised, suspended beneath skylights. The upward trending circular spiral of the ramp is the pervading theme of the store developed in endless variation: reduced to disc or hole, elongated as cylinder or tube, blown into domes and spheres. Shapes of mass and void become complex, involute, as these basic forms cut through each other in endless seeming space and light. Yet all is so vigorously organized that the total effect is one of singleness, breadth and peace that conveys to one a sense of great well-being.

The visitor tends to extend the pleasure from the appropriate building to the wares appropriately displayed in the appropriate black walnut cases and emphasized in the circular wall niches. This transformation from a curious investigator to an eager customer is accomplished with dignity and dispacth.

The shop too is, in a way, an autobiographical sketch of its architect, from the arch-pierced masonry wall in the grand tradition of Richardson and Louis Sullivan to the spiral ramp of his own museum for New York City. Yet its glance is not behind but is well ahead. And if Frank Lloyd Wright is as prophetic here as he has been in the past, we may confidently expect a revival of that half-forgotten half-remembered element of Architecture—the Wall.

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A local firm working closely with the architect fabricated the plastics parts. The ceiling was composed of 24 large concave domes, 6 feet 8 in. in diameter plus flange, and 96 convex domes, 22 in. in diameter plus flange. Domes in both sizes were formed from $\frac{3}{16}$ in. thick sheets of acrylic plastic.

The smaller domes were free blown. The larger domes had to be formed from four sections cleverly cemented together. All plastic parts were waxed with an anti-static coating to neutralize static electricity which might attract dust particles from the air.

The plastic domes were suspended in a lattice work of steel. Flexible construction was needed to provide for expansion and contraction of the plastic material, which also had to be firmly enough attached to withstand vibration from heavy passing traffic.

A 44 inch hemispheric bowl of clear plastic holds aquatic plants and fish, a 38 inch bowl holds flowers. This, like the fish bowl is free blown.

Forming perfect hemispheres by the free-blowing methods calls for extremely careful control of heat and air pressure, making functionally strong and a true hemisphere in a painstaking process of hand skill.

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A WORD FROM THE ARCHITECT

UNTRUE TO SAY THAT ANY STORE I HAVE DONE OR MIGHT DO EITHER "UPSETS" ANY "RULES" OF "COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE" OR SETS UP NEW ONES OF ITS OWN. CORRECT TO SAY THAT WHAT UNFAILINGLY INTERESTS ME IS THE EXCEPTION AS NECESSARY TO PROVE ANY RULE BOTH USEFUL AND USELESS. IN ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE EVERY OPPORTUNITY STANDS ALONE.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT